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PRRC emerging trends

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Most Teens Consider Themselves Religious Persons

Elders throughout history have fretted that the younger generation has lost the sense of their heritage and religious values, but a recent Gallup Youth Survey demonstrates that a majority of the young people of America continue to consider religion important in their lives.

About seven teen-agers in 10 say they agree with the statement that they are religious persons, including 19 percent who very strongly agree. Among the remaining three in 10 who disagree, only 5 percent strongly assert they are not religious. These findings are in line with Gallup survey results in recent decades that only about 5 percent of the total American population regard themselves as atheists or agnostics.

The youngest teens, ages 12 and 13, are the most likely to consider themselves to be religious persons. In the mid-teen years of 14 and 15, the survey suggests there may be a slight spirit of rebellion among some teens as their commitment to religion wavers, but it soon bounces back in the later teen years.

Religious feelings among teens are weakest in the East where just 63 percent of the young people consider themselves religious persons. This may, however, be more of a reflection of urban conditions than of regional values. Throughout the country, as urban density decreases the sense of the importance of religion grows among teens. As a result, while only 15 percent of the teen residents of large cities strongly agree that they are religious persons, one rural teen in four would describe himself this way. The lack of religious fervor among the young people of large cities may also in part be a reflection of the difficulty that some churches have had in recent years in maintaining their presence in the inner city because of serious declines in funds, clergy, and lay leaders.

While Protestant and Catholic teens are both likely to describe themselves are religious persons, Protestants somewhat more frequently view themselves as being strongly religious (23 percent to 14 percent for Catholics).

Not too surprisingly, 86 percent of teens who attended religious services at least once during the week preceding the time of interview, say they are religious minded. Findings that just 12 percent of attenders disagree they are religious and that 2 percent strongly disagree suggest that few teens are being compelled by their parents to attend church against their wishes.

The findings also suggest that non-attendance of religious services by teens should not be interpreted as meaning they do not consider themselves to be religious persons. Among those who missed attending church or synagogue in the previous week, a majority of 55 percent still maintains they are religious minded.

Overall, young men and young women show about equal interest in religion, but among the ranks of those with the strongest convictions, young women take the lead, by a margin of 22 percent to 16 percent.

White and non-white teens show about equal interest in religion. Although the Hispanic population is often considered very religious, Hispanic teens are among those least likely to consider themselves to be religious persons. When asked on the survey about their convictions, a slight majority of 57 percent of Hispanic teens said they are religious, but 43 percent disagreed.

The findings are based on telephone interviews conduct among a nationwide representative sample of 1,125 teen-agers, ages 12 to 17, conducted in June and July 1992.

For findings based on samples of this size, one can say with 95 percent confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects could be 3 percentage points in either direction.

Catholics Are Proud of Their Schools

Catholics usually are proud of the schools they support in their local communities, and many non-Catholics join them in the belief that they are superior to public schools in several respects. Many people believe, however, that the excellence that is achieved by the Catholic schools sometimes comes at a social price of not meeting the needs of the wider community, and for that matter, not always preparing their own students to deal with the many cultural and economical problems of America's increasingly diverse society.

Catholics and non-Catholics hand out just about the same grades to their local public schools, with a slight majority saying they should be given either an "A" or a "B." Catholics tend to give much higher grades to the local Catholic schools, with 83 percent saying they deserve an "A" or "B." Only one Catholic in eight (12 percent) believes the local church-affiliated schools are just average or failing.

Non-Catholics frequently are handicapped by their lack of knowledge of the Catholic schools, and when it comes their turn to judge them, one in four is unable to rate the local parochial school system. The majority of non-Catholics, however, say the Catholic schools should get an "A" or "B," Only 17 percent see them as just average and 4 percent feel they are below average or failing.

When adults are asked to make a direct comparison between the overall quality of education provided by the Catholic and public schools, nearly half say Catholic schools are better, 16 percent feel public schools are better, and 34 percent think they are about the same.

Very decidedly the public usually feels Catholic schools provide more discipline and do a better job of instilling morals and ethical behavior in the young. A majority also believe Catholic schools are safer than public schools, and provide an environment where there is less chance for students to get involved with drugs or alcohol .

Academically speaking, the results are mixed. Many people believe Catholic schools provide smaller class sizes, have a better quality of teaching staff and provide children with a good foundation in academic studies.

Public schools more often are seen as offering special programs for gifted or talented students, and having a greater variety and number of academic courses.

Critics of parochial and private schools have contended that they are able to outperform public schools because they do not have to accept those who are academically unmotivated or disadvantaged. The survey results show the public generally feels the public schools accommodate a wider range of students, and that there is a social price that is paid by students who attend Catholic schools. The public schools more often are given the edge as better preparing students to deal with the problems of modern society and to get along with people from different, social, economic, racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Public schools are believed to have students from a wider range of social, ethnic, and economic backgrounds and to provide special programs for students with learning problems. To meet these greater needs, the public schools more often are viewed as possessing better physical facilities, and offering a wider range of extracurricular activities.

The results reported on pages 2 – 4 are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 1,239 adults, 18 years of age and older, including 492 Roman Catholics. Interviewing was conducted from July 3 through July 30, 1992 by The Gallup Organization for the National Catholic Educational Association.

For findings based on samples of this size, one can say with 95 percent confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects could be 3 percentage points in either direction for the national sample, and 5 percentage points for the sample of Catholics.

GRADING THE LOCAL SCHOOLS

Students are often given the grades A, B, C, D, and FAIL to denote the quality of their work. Suppose the public schools (Catholic schools), themselves, in your community were graded in the same way, what grade would you give the public schools in your area — A, B, C, D, or FAIL?

	Public Schools		Catholic Schools	
	Catholics	Non-Catholics	Catholics	Non-Catholics
A	17%	17%	32%	16%
B	37	38	51	40
C	25	29	11	17
D	10	7	1	2
FAIL	6	6	*	2
No opinion	5	3	4	23

*Less than one-half of 1 percent

COMPARATIVE QUALITY

I am going to read to you some factors involved in education. For each, I'd like you to tell me if you think, in general, Catholic schools are better than public schools in this regard, public schools are better than Catholic schools in this regard, or are they about the same.

	Catholic schools better	Public schools better	About the same
Overall quality of education	48%	16%	34%
Level of discipline provided	75	6	17
Developing morals and ethical behavior	74	6	19
Small class sizes	68	9	20
Providing an environment with less chance for students to get involved with drugs or alcohol	62	8	28
Safety of students	59	8	30
Quality of the teaching staff	44	20	33
Providing children a good foundation in academic subjects	43	21	32
Preparing students to deal with the problems of modern society	28	37	33
Preparing students to get along with people from different social, racial, economic,or ethnic backgrounds	27	44	27
Physical facilities	26	39	31
Special programs for gifted or talented students	23	45	26
Special programs for students with learning problems	20	56	22
Academic courses offered	19	51	26
Students from a wide range of backgrounds	13	61	24
Extracurricular activities	2	63	22

Note: "No opinion" (2 – 5 percent, nationally) is not shown in the table

Free Resource To Assist The Disabled

The National Organization on Disability has prepared a 56-page handbook, *That All May Worship,* to assist congregations, denominational groups, and seminarians in welcoming people with disabilities into all aspects of worship and religious life. The handbook is interfaith in scope and concerns people with all types of disabling conditions.

This resource guide contains inspirational language, empowering photographs, and a dynamic presentation revealing the gifts of people with physical, sensory, and mental disabilities.

Single copies of *That All May Worship* are available at no charge. Additional copies may be obtained by sending a contribution of $6 a copy, payable to N.O.D. Please mail your request and contribution, if any, to:

Religion and Disability Program
National Organization on Disability
910 16th Street, N.W., Suite 600
Washington, DC 20006

The initial capital letters in this issue are called *Walrod Initials* and were designed by Jonathan Hodges of Penguin Productions. They are based upon artwork prepared by Jeffrey G. Level and Bruce Frame and called *Geometrica.* This font in turn was derived from the 16th century artistry of Albrecht Dürer as presented in his work on *The Just Shaping of Letters.*

Tax Relief for Church-Based Schools

A majority of the American public approves of diverting some of the money that now is spent on the public schools to help parents pay for tuition at private or parochial schools.

As might be expected, support for parental choice is higher among those who now have children in elementary or high school, with two in three saying they would approve. It is even greater among those who have children now attending private or Catholic schools, with three in four giving their support.

Although many denominations sponsor parochial or private schools, Roman Catholics have established the largest parochial school systems in the nation. Catholics are more likely than non-Catholics to favor tax support for parochial schools, by a margin of 71 percent to 57 percent.

When asked which groups should receive funding if the government provides it, the majority of all demographic groups say they would like it for all families. One person in four , however, would limit funds to poor and moderate income families, and 10 percent say only poor families should receive tax support if they want to send their children to private or parochial schools.

Some critics have contended that support of parochial schools with tax funds would be in conflict with constitutional requirements for the separation of church and state. If the U.S. Supreme Court were to rule that public funding for parental choice of school is constitutional, this could result in even greater support by a nearly two-to-one margin of 64 percent to 33 percent. Among parents, seven in 10 of those who now have children in public schools would approve, as would nearly all Catholic school parents (94 percent).

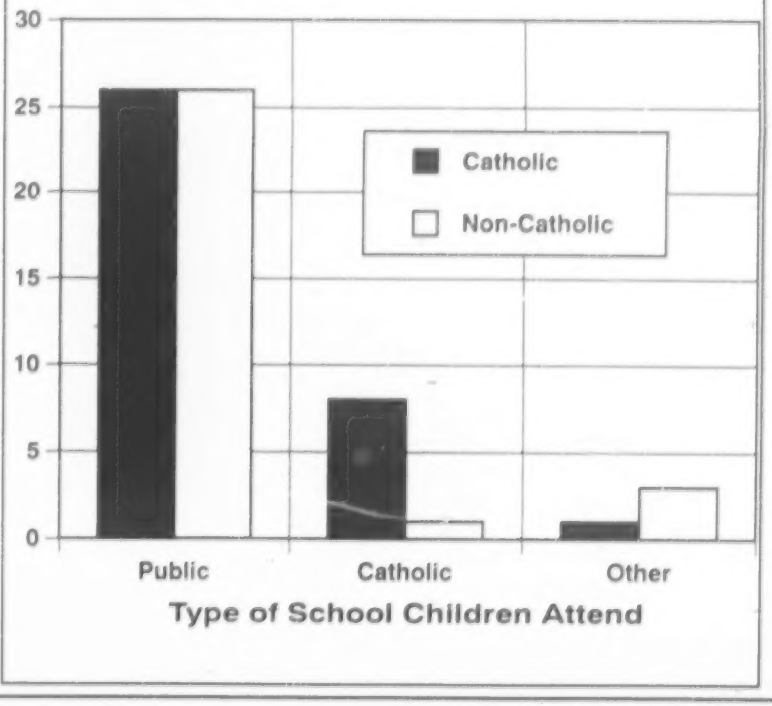
Potential Opposition

Although many parents, particularly those who are Catholic, would approve of tax support for alternative schools, opposition would likely be found from other sectors of society. Opponents of parental choice plans are quick to point out that in the past when proposals for them have come under close scrutiny, public support often wanes. Only a slight majority of 57 percent of the non-Catholic population now approves of such a plan, and the number who would approve if the supreme court give its blessing would grow just three percentage points to 60 percent.

As many a school board member can testify, there are a lot of older people who no longer have children in the schools and who will come out and vote against just about any increase in school taxes. Accordingly, half of the population who are 55 and older are opposed to the idea of parental choice at public expense, and 42 percent say they would still be opposed even if the supreme court were to rule the use of tax funds would be constitutional.

Where Children Attend School

Twenty-six percent of both Catholics and non-Catholics have children who attend public schools. Eight percent of Catholics have children in the Catholic schools. Four percent of non-Catholics have children attending private or church-related schools.



A Message on Radio Free Europe To The Young People of Romania

By George H. Gallup, Jr.

I feel honored to speak to the young people of Romania about the importance of faith in our lives. We in the West are aware of the pain in your lives, and of your intense struggles.

We are aware of your great material needs in your daily life. We also know of your great spiritual needs — and these you share with youth in all parts of the world:

- the need to believe that life is meaningful and has a purpose;
- the need for a sense of community and for deep relationships, an acute need in view of the fact that life in the world is becoming increasingly impersonal;
- the need to be appreciated and loved;
- and finally, the need to be listened to — to be heard. Many young people in the world feel utterly alone.

What is the answer to these four basic needs? How are these needs to be met?

I believe, with all my heart, that they are met in the living presence of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

People come to Christ in many ways. Certainly through Holy Scripture. Through an experience of the living Christ in one's life. Through books written by spirit-filled authors. Through an intense inner life. Through obedience. Often by the example of others. And for many a growing number of small groups that meet regularly to study the Bible, pray, and to share each other's life in Christ.

All of the above have been important to me in my own faith journey. But, as a pollster, I have also been inspired and influenced by numbers and statistics. I believe that through surveys we encounter miracles in a fresh and updated way. Here are what I believe to be dramatic examples:

(1) The powerful appeal today of Jesus Christ 2,000 years after his death. The spread of Christianity following Pentecost is a miracle in itself. Today, 1.5 billion people around the globe claim to be Christians. Jesus Christ is a person who cannot be ignored. Many may not have accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, but they continue to be fascinated and irresistibly drawn to him.

(2) Not only have the life and ministry of Jesus Christ captured the attention of many people, but belief in the risen Christ has enabled some to surmount themselves in extraordinary ways. Some are lifted out of themselves to perform heroic acts of sacrifice. Your example already is profoundly inspiring to young people in the West.

(3) Many people today can find no fault whatsoever with Jesus Christ, a finding of particular importance in this age of widespread cynicism. For many young people around the world, Jesus Christ continues to stand above reproach and criticism. Does this not qualify as a miracle?

Why do people look elsewhere for the meaning of life? In my nation many lesser gods — materialism for example — compete for our attention, and sometimes we turn back on our heavenly Father. You, in your pain, are in the unique position to receive the gift of true faith, since you are not yet distracted by the great and debilitating lures of modern life. You can be — and are — a great example to the youth of my nation and of other nations.

One comes to Christ through the heart and through experience. One also comes to Christ through the mind. I have always felt the power of the logic of the question — was Jesus a liar, a madman, or was he the son of God?

I believe in the full authority of Scripture. I believe the message of the Gospel is clear, but impossible even to begin to follow without the grace of God as revealed in his son. I believe that God is accessible and does not require a gigantic intellectual struggle to come to him. What is required is obedience. As countless millions of people over the centuries have testified: understanding follows rather than precedes faith.

I believe that living as a Christian answers the eternal questions: "Why am I here?" "What is the purpose of my life?" And I believe that it is important for one to try to come to a decision about Jesus Christ. Many young people, it would appear, not so much disbelieve as sidestep the issue. A conscious decision is important, yet as we all know, Christianity is very much a growth experience. There is a sign over a monastery in Europe with the words: "Let us again today begin to be Christians." Daily we must struggle — daily acknowledge our sin, repent, and accept God's forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

Christian growth continues through a lifetime. One never "arrives." That is what makes the Christian life so exciting. God's plan for our lives is continually revealed to us as we seek to grow in obedience to him.

Important to the faith deepening process is the gift of prayer. One can start simply: "Oh God, teach me to pray." And faith can be deepened through companionship and community.

Turn to the Holy Scriptures to discover the good news of Jesus Christ and his victory over the world and to discover the incredible life-changing and life-saving power of Christ, a power available to everyone of us!

Advertisement

1992 Religion in America Report

The soon to be published **Religion in America 1992** report marks the 25th anniversary of the initiation of these regular and eagerly-awaited publications, which present facts and interpretations of the latest trends in religious beliefs and practices, as well as the public's changing views on the impact of religion on society.

Many of the indicators reported have become the basic standard measurements of organized religion in the United States.

This report will present a detailed analysis of church attendance and membership by key population groups, and by major faiths and denominations. A special commentary by George Gallup, Jr. will set forth the major challenges and growing opportunities facing churches in the immediate years ahead.

If you preach, write, or teach, we sincerely believe you will find this PRRC publication to be a constant aid in your mission.

Special pre-publication offer: Those who order **Religion in America 1992** now, will also receive a free copy of **100 Questions and Answers.** Written by George Gallup, Jr. and Sarah Jones, this book contains 100 of the most important questions we have surveyed in the area of religion.

This book, which represents the distillation of many recent Gallup surveys, deals in depth with each of 100 topics — analysis by key demographic groups, trends, background information and tables. Selections include religious belief and ethics, religion and politics, religious experience and spiritual development and commitment. This book will provide important historical trends to supplement the latest information contained in **Religion in America 1992.**

To receive **Religion in America 1992** and your complimentary copy of **100 Questions and Answers** send your check or money order for $30 to Princeton Religion Research Center, 47 Hulfish Street, P.O. Box 389, Princeton, NJ 08542.

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